

Recent observations in the Udzungwa and Uluguru Mountains, Central Tanzania

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Stuart and Jensen documented range extensions and other notable records of forest birds in Tanzania¹. Since then the University of Copenhagen has been carrying out biodiversity studies of the Udzungwa and Uluguru forest systems. These studies have already produced two new species and further range extensions for the Udzungwas.^{1,2,3} These reports stimulated us to organise a visit to those two forest systems with a diversion to Ifakara in between. Aware that David Moyer was actively working in the Udzungwas, we sought his advice and he recommended that we should concentrate our efforts on Udekwa (Ndundulu Mts) for that particular forest system, where with luck we could find most if not all of the key species.

CC and NH drove from Botswana on 8 November 1995 with an initial destination of Iringa in southern central Tanzania. Here they met up with David Moyer, who provided much needed support in terms of logistics, specific advice etc, and were joined by EM. We arrived in the Ndundulu forest on 13 November (four-wheel-drive vehicle and four hours of walking being essential), departing after six days. Ifakara was visited on 20 November and then onto Morogoro on 21 November. Here we were very kindly assisted by the Tanzanian Regional Forestry Office, especially Lameck Noah and M Masati, and Zul Bhatia from the Royal Society for the Protection of Bird who allowed us to refer to the draft Uluguru biodiversity report. This influenced us to visit the North Uluguru Forest Reserve from Tegetero (again a four-wheel-drive vehicle and three hours arduous walking being essential) between the 22–24 November. The following day we visited the adjacent Kimboza Forest Reserve for a day and night, before returning to Iringa, saying goodbye to EM, and driving back to Botswana.

Ndundulu Mountains (Udzungwa)

The two primary target species in this forest were the Udzungwa Forest Partridge *Xenoperdix udzungwensis* and the Rufous-winged Sunbird *Nectarinia rufipennis*. Having arrived exhausted on the evening of 13 November at Matumbu camp (c 1,350 m asl), the 14th produced little reward other than six species of greenbul, including Shelley's *Andropadus masukuensis*. That evening we decided that, lack of porters notwithstanding, we must make the effort to reach

Mufu camp at c 1,750 m on 15 November. This we did obtaining excellent views of Sharpe's Akalat *Sheppardia sharpei* on the way up. The late afternoon effort at the new site produced good views of Thick-billed Seedeater *Serinus burtoni melanocrous*, and Spot-throat *Modulatrix stictigula*.

Up at dawn the next morning (not difficult, given the incessant night-long calling of Tree Hyrax *Dendrobyrax arboreus* in every tree), there was tantalising bird song. An initial effort to call in Pale-breasted Illadopsis *Illadopsis rufipennis* by playback provided NH with a good view of Dappled Mountain Robin *Arcanator orostruthus*. By being extremely still and patient, further excellent views of the bird were achieved. The process took some two hours. Such effort was rewarded by a return to camp for breakfast.

During that break, EM decided to visit the seepage spring close by in order to create a very small pool for drawing our water. A little later some muted shouts of 'Nigel, Nigel, kuja, kuja iku partridge' had NH and CC drop everything other than their binoculars and move towards Elia's call. We were able to get to within 20 m of four of the birds we had come so far to see and to view them in shade and sunlight. We saw them feeding, walking and flying. We felt that the picture in *Ibis* does not do them justice. In particular, we were struck by the three bold black bars that are visible along each wing. We could hardly believe our luck.

Our attention turned to the quest for the Rufous-winged Sunbird. EM suggested we try a 1–2 hour walk to an area where he had seen them on a previous occasion. We did not find the sunbird, probably because of the lack of flowers at that time of the year at that altitude. We were fortunate, however, in seeing Red-capped Forest Warbler *Orthotomus metopias*, Pale-breasted Illadopsis, another partridge and the common Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx montanus*. In the afternoon we ventured above the camp. Whilst enjoying watching Fulleborn's Black Boubou *Laniarius fuelleborni*, and more Red-capped Forest Warblers, EM detected a soft call note, that he believed to be the Iringa Ground Robin *Sheppardia lowei*. The use of tape recording and playback confirmed this and again excellent views were obtained.

We returned to camp but the day was not over. After supper EM asked if the other two of us would like

to see a partridge roosting. When he returned half an hour later with a broad grin, we did not believe it could be anything but a leg pull. However, we went off with our three torches, and in exactly the same area that we had had our good fortune in the morning, Elia shone his torch on a spindly sapling some 8–10 m away from the path. We were at eye level with a single partridge. Remaining apparently calm and unruffled, the bird let us approach to less than 5 m and accepted centre stage in the illumination provided by our three torches. As they say in swahili, 'safi kabisa'.

The next day we decided to go downhill in search of the sunbird, reasoning that on the way up at c 1,500 m we had observed an ample quantity of red flowers on a band of trees adorning a ridge, which were certainly attracting the Olive Sunbirds *N. olivacea*. Breaking camp the next morning (the call of *croy-chi-chik* heard before the dawn chorus could well be attributed to the partridge), we set off reasonably early. It was a relief to unload backpacks at our ridge spot and enjoy the thought of a couple of hours sedentary birdwatching.

For an hour we were unable to convert Olive Sunbirds into any other species, but then all three of us were suddenly alerted by sunbird calls that were different. A tantalising glimpse of a blue head by NH raised the excitement further. Then in full sunlight on a treetop, CC and EM had zeroed in on a male. Where was NH? He was 15 metres away under the all important tree, getting great views of the female's yellow underparts with well pronounced streaking, listening to CC exclaim over the blue of the male! Further sightings of the male in the canopy were tantalising, and then the pair disappeared as quickly as they had come. A shake of hands and then on with the descent to our original camp.

Arriving in the early afternoon, we found all well at camp but there was no sign of the watchman we had detailed to look after it. There was nothing to suggest any mishap and knowing that this was his home area, we trusted all was well and that he would reappear by the evening. So back out for some more birding, to be rewarded with great sightings of Swynnerton's Robin *Swynnertonia swynnertonii*. Sure enough our return to camp found our watchman back at post. Apparently he had decided, and this was an elderly gentleman, that he could not borrow our matches in the camp and so he walked four hours to the village and then four hours back to camp with his own matches.

On our way back to Udekwa village excellent views of White-chested Alethe *Alethe fuelleborni*, White-winged Apalis *Apalis chariessa* and Brown

Parisoma *Parisoma lugens* concluded a memorable six days in the Ndundulu part of the Udzungwa Forest complex. The journey by car continued to Mikumi, which was to be the base for our interlude to find Kilombero Weaver *Ploceus burnieri*.

Ifakara

On the morning of 20 November, we drove from Mikumi along a patchy road to the site locality of this weaver at Ifakara ferry. We were somewhat dismayed to find fairly degraded, dried out and burnt patches of reedbed interspersed with open areas, and presumed a bird with apparently such a restricted distribution would need habitat in better condition than this. However, within 30 m of the roadside stalls by the ferry, we found a male coming into full breeding dress, including the chestnut outer edging to the black face and throat mask.

We were aware that this area contained possibly two species of cisticola. The first is thought by some to be a subspecies of Winding Cisticola *C. galactotes* and the second a subspecies of Black-lored Cisticola *C. nigriloris*. That there are at least two different cisticolas in that area is certain. However our observations, for what it is worth, suggested that the bird, which might be *galactotes*, appears to have a jizz and behaviour very different to that species. An appropriate English name could be 'Pipit-like Cisticola' since its body/tail/leg proportions, shape, walk and feeding behaviour were all reminiscent of that family.

The second bird has no black lores, unlike *nigriloris*, but does have a song that is very similarly structured to that species. CC taped the duet of the Ifakara birds and playback certainly stimulated a vigorous response without fail. Out of interest NH then tried the duet of *nigriloris* from a pre-recorded tape and this produced no response at all, despite several attempts, even when the birds were excited by CC's playback. This is apparently the reverse of Bob Dowsett's and Francoise Dowsett Lemaire's experience, who applied the same test a few years back.

Uluguru Mountains

Morogoro Town sits at the base of the Uluguru Mountains and this was where we expected to find Zul Bhatia, in the hope that he could give us the latest information on the Uluguru Bush Shrike *Malaconotus alius*. On the way up to Bunduki we stopped to enjoy a low-flying flock of five different swift species, including Scarce Swift *Schoutedenapus myoptilus*, and five different species of swallow. We found Zul and his party at Bunduki and, as luck would have it, Zul had Svendsen and Hansen's draft report. It revealed

that our best chance for the bush shrike was at the Tegetero section of the north forest on the other side to Bunduki. We therefore headed back to Morogoro for a night stop and fresh permits for the new area.

Again excellent co-operation from the Forest Department helped us get away to Kinole Tandai (the last village below Tegetero Mission) in the morning, where we met the local forester, Mr Masati, and the village chairman. Reaching Tegetero Mission would have been impossible without high clearance and the low ratio gears of our four-wheel-drive vehicle. On arrival Mr Masati quickly organised his two assistants and porters and 3.5 hours later we staggered exhausted into our selected campsite at c 1,550 m, just as it was getting dark. CC swears that if he had known what was ahead, even the bush shrike would not have tempted him. We retired to bed early that night wondering if our legs would be able to move the next day.

Dawn saw us endeavouring to convert Many-coloured Bush Shrikes *M. multicolor* into *M. alius*. From then on we were intent on trying to distinguish any call of which we were not sure, since we had been told that the Uluguru Bush Shrike had a distinctive call. During this process we gained good views of Loveridge's Sunbird *Nectarinia loveridgei* and heard Mrs Moreau's Warbler *Bathmocercus winifredae*. At 11.00 hr near the camp, CC managed to tape almost the last note of an unusual call. It was enough to stimulate a response, and a better recording brought the bird right in to reveal in full splendour and voice the beautiful, impossible Uluguru Bush Shrike – magical!

It was in the lull after this that EM explained to NH that the evening before he thought he had heard the 'Usambara' Eagle Owl *Bubo poensis vosseleri*, which he had heard previously in the Usumbaras. There was nothing we could do about it until the evening, so we decided to try for Mrs Moreau's Warbler after some lunch. We returned to the location where we had first heard the bird, but initially any effort to attract it through playback, seemed to evoke a response but never brought the bird closer. Then we remembered that we had read somewhere that the species was very particular in regard to its habitat requirements. So we moved closer until we felt we were by suitable undergrowth, and tried again. Instantly we had a really gorgeous bird come and inspect us from only a few feet away – more magic.

Remarkably all three of us were awake that night at 03.30 hr in the cold hours of the pre-morning, to find ourselves listening to the unmistakable call of the eagle owl. We dressed quickly and playback brought in a second bird and we were treated to a duet with a

bird on either side. Comparisons with other recordings of the owl in the Usambaras and West Africa confirm the identity. Given that this is an important range extension, full details of the record are being provided in a separate article.

Things had gone so well, that our next plan was to pay a visit to the nearby low-altitude Kimboza Forest Reserve to see if we could locate Kretschmer's Longbill *Macrosphenus kretschmeri* and the Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird *Antbreptes neglectus*. Having set up camp at Kimboza, we set off in the afternoon to try and find the longbill. EM had done some reconnaissance and guided us to what he thought might be appropriate habitat. We had been told that the song was the best indicator of its presence, yet we picked up some movement in a thickish tangle of vegetation and found that the very first bird we had chanced on in Kimboza was the longbill – unbelievable!

Alas the sunbird proved elusive, but we had lovely views of Bat-like *Neafrapus boehmi* and Mottled Spinetail *Telacanthura ussheri* flying alongside, Green-headed Oriole *Oriolus chlorocephalus* and Lesser Seedcracker *Pyrenestes minor*, amongst other good species. On the morning of 26 November we began our journey to Gaborone, CC and NH making a successful excursion to find Angola White-bellied Sunbird *N. oustaleti* on 28 November, before heading homewards.

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References

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